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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S.-TAIWAN RELATIONS

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused news coverage August 23 on President Chen Shui-bian's trip to Central America; on his recent interview with the BBC on Taiwan's current status; on the 2008 presidential poll; and on a corruption case concerning a renovation project of the National Palace Museum. The pro-independence "Liberty Times" ran a banner headline on page five that said "Interview with BBC, Bian [Says]: Taiwan Is Already Independent and Thus Does Not Need to Declare [Independence]."

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, a "Liberty Times" op-ed, citing recent remarks of former U.S. ambassador to the UN, John Bolton, urged the United States to acknowledge Taiwan's current status as a nation. An editorial in the pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" discussed President Chen Shui-bian's "low-profile" protest to the United States in Anchorage, Alaska Tuesday and urged Washington to engage in direct dialogue with Taipei. End summary.

A) "The United States Should Acknowledge Taiwan's National Status"

Shen Chieh, a freelance writer, opined in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 720,000] (8/23):

"Former U.S. ambassador to the UN John Bolton urged the United States to resume diplomatic relations with Taiwan in an attempt to prevent China's intervention and to maintain the United States' interests. Such an assertion meets the basic expectation of the majority of the Taiwan people: Namely, the international community accepts the status quo that both sides of the Taiwan Strait are 'one country on either side' [of the Strait].

"The strategy previously adopted by Washington to address issues across the Taiwan Strait focused on suppressing Taiwan and not reviewing the mistakes in U.S. policy. In fact, the approach that can best tally with cross-Strait security, the U.S. interests, democracy and the principle of justice is for the United States to acknowledge Taiwan's current status as a nation and to [help] integrate Taiwan into international organizations. ..."

B) "U.S. Should Hear Chen's Silent Protest"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" [circulation: 20,000] editorialized (8/23):

"President Chen Shui-bian gave the United States government a mild taste of Taiwan-style democratic activism Tuesday morning on a brief refueling stop in Anchorage, Alaska en route to a summit with Central American and Caribbean allies in Honduras. It is obvious that the George W. Bush administration imposed 'uncomfortable, inconvenient and undignified' conditions on Chen's transit through the U.S. in response to recent decisions by Taiwan's president to submit an application for Taiwan to join the United Nations and not to stand in the way of a Democratic Progressive Party-initiated referendum on the question of whether to use the name of 'Taiwan' to

join the U.N.. ...

"We strongly urge the Bush administration to hear the constructive message in Chen's silent protest. The Washington establishment, including all parties, should imagine themselves in Taiwan's shoes and realize how serious the current threats posed by the People's Republic of China are to a democratic Taiwan and try to appreciate the fact that the desire to enter the U.N. is shared by the vast majority of Taiwan citizens regardless of partisan affiliation. ... The gaps between Taipei and Washington in the past few years under the Chen and Bush II administrations have undoubtedly been worsened by the lack of direct channels of dialogue between senior leaders in both governments, not to mention the exclusion by Washington's adherence to a 'one-China policy' of any possibility of direct discussion between the two presidents.

"This state of affairs is aptly demonstrated in the current controversy regarding Taiwan's application to join the U.N. and the DPP-initiated referendum on whether to use the name of 'Taiwan' to enter the U.N. The Bush administration may see 'democratic Taiwan' and its drive to maintain a proper position in international society as an annoyance in Washington's efforts to 'integrate' the PRC into the international system and to secure Beijing's assistance in resolving problems such as the North Korean nuclear program. It may also reflect the festering consequences of the U.S.-initiated war in Iraq. However, Washington appears blind to the very real threat to the security of Taiwan's democracy and survival posed by Beijing's deployment of nearly 1,000 ballistic missiles targeted against Taiwan and its "legal warfare" campaign to establish a "consensus" in international society that "Taiwan is an integral part of the PRC," as claimed by U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. ...

"The most direct and peaceful ways to engage in such a refutation were precisely to issue an application to join the United Nations as 'Taiwan' and to provide an opportunity for our 23 million people to

express their own views on the subject by supporting the DPP-initiated referendum. Regardless of whether the Bush administration supports or opposes this initiative, we believe it was unprincipled and unwise for the Bush administration to 'punish' President Chen for representing the interests of his country and electorate. Moreover, we believe Chen is correct in his assertion that the substandard treatment meted out to a directly elected president of a democratic ally was also a sanction against all of Taiwan's people and an insult to our hard-won democracy.

"On a deeper level, Washington's actions are also a negation of the claims by the U.S. itself to be an independent and democratic nation since the Bush administration has effectively drawn a red line to constrain Taiwan democracy at the behest, directly or indirectly, of the authoritarian PRC regime. Regardless of Washington's position on Taiwan's U.N. entry, we urge Bush to accept President Chen's proposal that Washington dispatch senior 'special representatives' to engage in direct dialogue with Taiwan counterparts to gain clearer understanding of each other's positions and concerns and to hopefully reduce the gaps between these two democratic allies."

YOUNG